



This booklet describes a unit of study in a class of Primary Division children. A few explanations and philosophical interpolations have been added. Otherwise this is the teacher's record of a unit of work actually presented in class.

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# Becoming a Reader

*Objective: to extend the children's understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences others have expressed in writing and to respond in personal ways to what has been communicated.*

Understanding what others have written involves more than the ability to decode and translate printed symbols. As pointed out in chapter 4, "Communication", of *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions*, the reader must become personally involved in thinking through and reflecting upon the ideas presented. To do this, children must find a relationship between their language and the language of the author. They must be able to relate the author's ideas to their personal experiences and to search for relevance, make judgements, draw conclusions, and integrate into their own thinking and their own experiences what the author has communicated.

The ideas and impressions a reader receives are of little value unless he responds and reacts to them personally. His responses can take any form from a single mental note to a comprehensive report. Through these responses

a reader clarifies and extends his thinking, and accommodates and assimilates the ideas, concepts, and attitudes that are important to him.

It is important to realize that most reading skills, particularly those identified as comprehension and interpretation, develop in a child's daily experience in living. The child who relates to printed symbols with understanding is one who has developed the thinking abilities she requires to understand, interpret, and respond to the people, things, and language within her environment.

Most children become readers as much through their own writing and the writing of their classmates as through printed books. When children write their own ideas on paper and read them to others, they understand the nature of reading and the concept of authorship. Therefore, reading, writing, and other forms of communication must develop side by side.



Each child in this class has had a unique set of experiences with the people, places, and events of his or her environment, as well as with language and printed symbols. These experiences have influenced the progress each child has made in his or her attempts to cope with print and to become a reader. Most of them have developed some strategies for decoding printed symbols and translating them into speech. The following groups of readers can be identified in the class.

Some children are able to use a variety of techniques to *break the code* and tackle printed materials with zest and excitement. They enjoy playing with the sounds and the rhythms of words, and are constantly in search of new words, phrases, and expressions.

Others are in the process of discovering that there is a variety of strategies to break the code. They have produced a number of simple books and have read their own stories and the stories of their peers. They have col-

lected a large number of words, phrases, and expressions of personal interest to them. Their teachers have extended and enriched this collection by introducing them to a common basic vocabulary. They have used these words in game activities, sorted and classified them into categories, added them to class dictionaries, and used them in their personal writing. These children read a variety of easy-to-read materials independently and meet daily with their teacher to extend their competence in decoding words and to discuss and interpret ideas presented in print.



A few children are experiencing great difficulty in noting the difference between certain speech sounds. They cannot make the fine discriminations needed to respond to and apply *phonics*. Through the sound, music, and listening centres, their teacher is providing them with more opportunities to hear and experiment with a variety of sound and speech patterns.

Several children have taken a longer time to develop strategies for decoding words, and at age seven and a half are still in the beginning stages of reading. Their own language and ideas, typed by parent volunteers, are used as reading material. The teacher uses words and phrases from these materials to help the

children note specific structural elements within words. The teacher meets them daily to share and interpret a variety of reading materials, gathered from the library and other sources and related to the children's current interests.

#### **A curriculum designed to help children become readers provides numerous opportunities to extend and enrich understanding.**

The following episode describes one activity that led to a variety of reading experiences. It began with a walk through the oldest part of town. Thirty-two children accompanied by a teacher, a consultant, and two parent volunteers, and equipped with tape recorders, Polaroid cameras, sketch pads, and pencils, set out to compare an old neighbourhood to their own. They noted differences in the structure of the houses, streets, buildings, and shops, and listened to the variety of languages spoken.

The children were divided into small groups of eight, each guided by an adult ready to provide the vocabulary needed to describe and explain their observations and experiences. New words and phrases were introduced in a real context and thus acquired a very specific meaning for the children.

A new sign, *Lacey's Antiques*, was mounted in a cutter on the lawn of an old house. It provided one opportunity for exploration and new experiences. Each group visited a different section of the antique store.

One group climbed into the attic to explore new sights, smells, and sensations. Attempts to deduce who might have owned or played with the treasures they discovered sparked the children's imaginations. They moved into the world of fantasy and imagined other creatures who might still inhabit the attic.

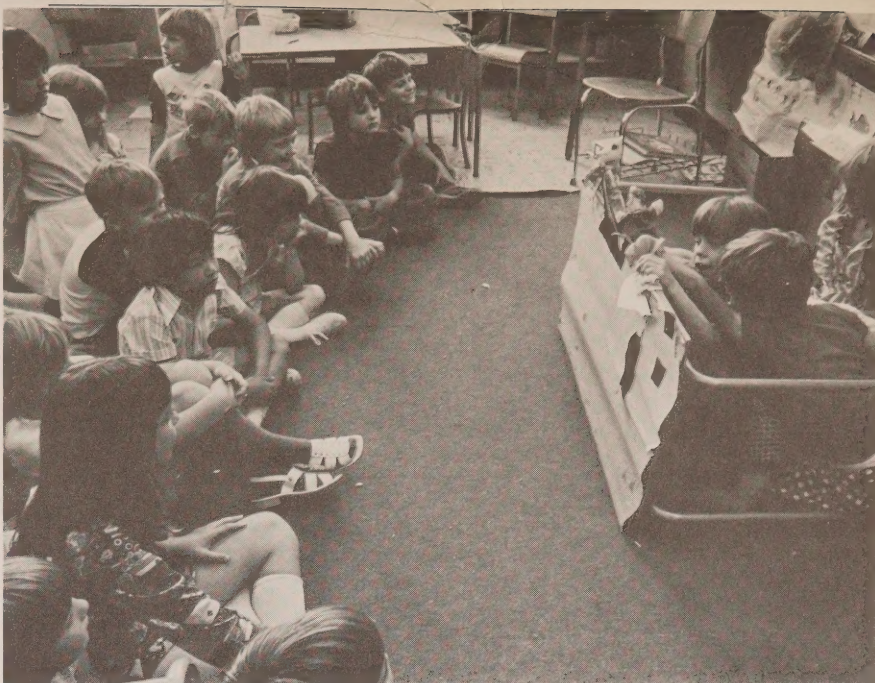
#### **The Teacher's Plan**

What Are the Specific Needs?	Who Requires Help?	How Will It Be Accomplished?
<b>Concepts that require clarification and extension:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• antique, treasure, collection;</li> <li>• value of old and beautiful things;</li> </ul>	Group that viewed the showroom treasures + Group that visited the repair shop	<b>Reading</b> (1) Interpretation of attitudes and feelings in <i>Nuremberg Stove</i> , an old German tale. Begin with a discussion and review of the Polaroid pictures, sketches, and paintings done on our excursion yesterday.
	"Bill's special collection"	(2) Introduce the collection of old clothes, baby clothes, records, books.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appreciation of personal pride and pleasure gained by people who collect and refinish old things.</li> </ul>	Whole class	(1) Mr. Lacey's visit in a week; (2) collections added to the various areas; (3) discussion in sharing sessions.
<i>Imagination and fantasy, sparked in the attic, requires extending.</i>	Robin's group	Develop a group story about attic creatures. (Begin with Polaroid pictures of Lacey's attic and the taped comments.) Robin, Jerry, and Bill had some creative ideas that will be a good beginning.
<b>Specific skills to be taught:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summarizing and recalling main ideas;</li> <li>• organizing information;</li> <li>• judging the relevance of statements;</li> </ul>	Robin's group	Using the group story, we create and develop information about our creatures and classify it under these headings: appearance, food, homes, travel, play.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interpreting feelings;</li> <li>• evaluating attitudes;</li> </ul>	Whole class	(1) Integrate material gathered above into teaching episodes. (2) Story time: Read Oscar Wilde's <i>The Selfish Giant</i> . (3) View film <i>Merry-Go-Round Horse</i> .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making comparisons;</li> <li>• noting similarities and differences between the old and the new.</li> </ul>	Whole class	<b>Choice Activities:</b> Discuss one area each day. Focus on the new information the children gained in the centre and the comparisons they made themselves.

Another group visited the repair shop. They stayed long enough to see a chair being assembled and explore a variety of odours and textures. Observing a blind operator caning a chair helped the children to recognize the patience and skill required for this operation.

Another group explored every inch of an old barn still standing behind the antique store. They examined, operated, and climbed over a variety of machinery and vehicles: a tractor, a bicycle built for two, a tricycle, a plough, a hayrack, a motorcycle, and an old car. Comments demonstrated a keen eye for detail as well as imagination.

The fourth group walked through the showroom of treasures, reading signs and explanations, noting prices, and taking pictures. They were attracted to the old school desks and books. They listened to the music from the old victrola, a player piano, and a nickelodeon.



#### Sharing Experiences and Planning More Action

*Responding and reacting to what has been communicated facilitates understanding when personal impressions are clarified and validated through recall, discussion, and expression.*

Significant comments recorded on tape recorders were replayed or translated into print by the group leaders. Discussion was in terms of *Who said it? When? Why?* and facilitated recall. It also provided the teacher with an excellent opportunity to identify strengths and limitations in observation, language, and understanding.

The children represented and expressed ideas gained from the experience in a variety of ways: painting, assembling photographs, construction, and writing. These activities provided the teacher with more clues.

Armed with the information noted during the sharing session, the teacher made plans for integrating the experiences gained at the antique shop into activities to extend understanding. The illustration has been extracted from her plan book.

#### Materials I Need to Add to the Areas

##### The Curiosity Area

Mr. Lacey suggested that the children examine his collection of bits and pieces, guess what each item is and how it is used, and check it with reference books and old department store catalogues. Make an activity card—add paper and pencils for guesses.

##### Dress-up Area

Add Mrs. Micheluk's wardrobe trunk and her collection of clothes and jewellery and Mrs. Jones's doll and old baby clothes.

##### The Reading Area

Add the collection of old readers and texts, photograph album, old magazines, department store catalogues of 1930 and 1976, and *My Book of Fairy Tales*.

#### Activity

##### The Nuremberg Stove

The discussion following the reading of this story allowed the readers to explore the emotions and feelings of the characters involved. They had to come to terms with the fact that beautiful things are important to people and that often treasures are priceless.

##### Bill's Special Collection

Bill's group examined the question of why people collect things and why these collections have personal value to the collectors.

#### Listening Centre

Add Mr. Wiley's victrola and his collection of records. A concertina, mouth organ, toy horn, and kazoo might introduce new sounds.

#### Maths Area

Add an *activity card* for comparing prices in old and new department store catalogues. Reprints are available for the years 1927 and 1935.

#### Writing Centre

Add straight pens and pen nibs, fountain pens, an ink bottle mounted in a sponge, and more blank booklets.

#### Plans in Action

The following two-column record is once more from the teacher's file.

#### Responses and Reactions

Although these children are rich in experiences and language, they could not really understand the feelings of the characters. A role-playing situation was devised to allow the children to be personally involved in a real-life experience with their own treasures. Each child in the group was asked to bring his special treasure to school the next day. I brought my own collection of porcelain birds. After sharing their treasures and exploring their feelings about them, the children were asked by the principal to donate their treasures to his collection of *gifts for the poor*. The discussion, stories, and dramatic presentations after this episode indicated that this group had grown in understanding of a *treasure*.

A schedule has been posted for showing collections and treasures. In the process of trying to have parents share personal collections with the class, the children have discovered *first hand* that people generally attach great value to their collections. In many cases the parents accompanied their collections to school, guarded them, and took them home after their presentation.

### Mr. Lacey's Visit

This gave the children the opportunity to verify, clarify, and expand their knowledge and understanding of his collection. No one was able to identify the button hook and moustache cup. His description of the cutter and its uses has opened up a new area for investigation. Some children will return to ride in a horse-drawn sleigh this winter and, since snow machines are used in this area, many comparisons and investigations can follow.

### Choice Activities

The daily discussions of the discoveries the children have made in the various areas (reading, listening, etc.) have revealed a variety of new information and language. Price comparisons led to a discussion in economics and the changing value of money. The dress-up centre led to role-playing and informal drama. The reading materials in the reading centre produced much amusement and laughter. Several youngsters have added the skill of playing a mouth organ to their repertoire, and the old victrola and records have elicited a number of new words to describe differences in sounds.

### Attic Creatures

This teaching episode was teacher-directed to a greater extent than average because Robin's group experiences more difficulty in reading than the rest of the class. After reading the story and interpreting and reacting by creating pictures with captions (this involved much discussion and clarification of impressions), the information about our creatures was summarized and organized under specific headings. Imaginary creatures were created from a variety of materials. They have names and a special playground created by a group of boys.

The group made their own creatures with cotton wool and pipe cleaners (these materials were selected after much sorting, touching, and evaluating) and presented the information to the class. The presentation sparked the imagination of the whole class and many creative activities followed.

One group produced a song which the whole class sings often, using a number of musical instruments and actions to illustrate the ideas presented.

The class read an article entitled "Learning to Fly", which presented several problems in understanding words like *spiral* and *flying by the mind's eye*.

The gym period provided an excellent opportunity for the class to experiment with the movement of imaginary creatures. Their bodies expressed their understanding of words like *spiral*, *bounce*, *slide*, *fly*, and *float*. Various groups created adventures in movement.

Individual children have expressed their ideas about their creatures in a variety of language forms. Their stories, poems, letters, and pictures have been discussed in small groups and are being read by all the children. One group of six children has been introduced to paragraphing and the use of quotation marks for direct narration. Christine's story, "The First Creature in the Stable", was used in this teaching episode (after Christine granted her permission).

The whole class created new information about their creatures. This information was analysed, discussed, and added to the original outline. All the information has been assembled and translated into a descriptive booklet. A parent volunteer has typed it. Various sections have been illustrated, and the book has been added to the school library. Another group of four children created, played with, and manipulated a family of finger puppets. They taped their dialogues, which have become the basis of a script for a play entitled *The Fuzz-Wuzz Who Visited Mars*.

Many new words, phrases, and expressions have been added to personal spelling and word lists. Several phonic and word games, used either on an assigned free-choice or a direct-teaching basis, have been added to the game centre.

Spelling, phonics, and word recognition skills have been dealt with each day, using the words that have grown from their experiences. Words like *creature*, *porcelain*, *victrola*, *nickelodeon*, *cutter*, *antique*, *florin* and *wardrobe* have been added to each child's store of meanings and appear frequently in oral and written expression.

The *migration headache* that causes the attic creatures to move from their winter home in an attic to a junkyard has introduced the concept of seasonal changes and *preparing for winter*.

The class has developed a flow chart and has organized an outline for study. Interest groups are formed, their specific questions are recorded, and a variety of resources are made available to them.

One small group has visited a service station to discover what *winterizing* a car involves.

Six competent readers have embarked on an independent study. They are investigating the concepts of *hibernation*



and *migration* and will share their information with the class.

Others are interviewing their parents and noting preparations people make for winter. A number of books and tapes prepared by older children are providing them with the information they need.

The activities in reading, writing, imagining, expressing, and responding will continue in and beyond the classroom. These children are growing into reading naturally. Their reading materials are varied, relevant, and enriching. They are read to regularly from books that are selected for their *uplifting* and *enriching* qualities. They have had many opportunities to write their own materials and read about the thoughts and experiences of their peers. Reading grows out of their experiences and interests. Their classroom and school libraries feature the materials they have produced. They have experienced many fulfilling moments in their attempts to cope with print and have discovered that their total environment is filled with symbols they can read and understand.